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Administration adopts less-stringent rules on secrecy

By Jack Nelson
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON—The Reagan Administration yesterday ordered officials involved in national security to sign a secrecy pledge and agree to cooperate in investigations of leaks of classified information.

The order, part of a crackdown President Reagan ordered on unauthorized disclosure of national security information, also strictly limits access by government officials to such information. In addition, it calls for the Attorney General to review the effectiveness of existing laws on such disclosures.

However, the order was not nearly as stringent as some intelligence officials had proposed. In fact, it dropped one provision of a Jan. 12 presidential directive that the press and some government information officers had criticized—a requirement that government employees get the permission of a senior official before contacting the media and then file a written report on the contact.

The order, signed by William P. Clark, Reagan's assistant for national security, supersedes the Jan. 12 directive.

David Gergen, Reagan's communications director, said the order "reflects a determined effort by all concerned to draw a proper balance between the legitimate need of the public's right to know and the need of the government in protecting classified information."

Clark ordered all departments to hold to the "absolute minimum" the number of people having access to national security information and to "strictly control document dissemination and reproduction to carry out existing law."

His order sets up a system under which each copy of a document circulated by the National Security Council will carry a numbered cover sheet bearing a notation that includes the secrecy pledge. The cover sheet contains this notice:

"The attached document contains sensitive National Security Council information. It is to be read and discussed only by persons authorized by law."

"Your signature acknowledged..."

"Persons handling this document acknowledge he or she knows and understands the security law relating thereto and will cooperate fully with any lawful investigation by the United States Government into any unauthorized disclosure of classified information contained herein."

The order requests that the Attorney General convene by March 1 an interagency group to report to the President on the effectiveness of existing statutes and executive orders prohibiting unauthorized disclosure of classified information.

Gergen said Clark had dropped the provision in the Jan. 12 directive regulating media contacts because of a feeling that it had "a chilling effect" on government press relations.

After the directive was issued, that provision was criticized by reporters, including Barrie Dunsmore of ABC-TV, president of the State Correspondents Assn., who wrote Clark a letter saying the directive already had caused some government officials to cancel scheduled appointments with journalists.

Clark met with Dunsmore and several other reporters Monday before deciding to delete that provision from his order.

After the new order was issued, Dunsmore said, "I'm delighted that the section on media contacts was dropped. When I talked with Clark Monday the draft of the order we were shown still had that section in it and it would have been devastating if it had been implemented."

President Reagan has spoken out frequently in recent weeks about leaks of national security information. In his Jan. 12 directive he referred to a "hemorrhage" of leaks and warned that "all legal methods" would be used to investigate the situation.

Speaking of the Administration's recent antileak activities and the new Clark order, Gergen said:

"What much of this endeavor of the last few weeks has done clearly—beyond and above the four corners of this document—is send a message through the ranks that the President regards the unauthorized disclosure of classified information as a serious matter. At the same